



# VICTORIOUS VIKINGS

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# Grand Forks Herald

SUNDAY, MARCH 6, 2022

## Prosecutors to appeal overturned ruling

**U.S. Attorney in ND to appeal ruling that overturned Alfonso Rodriguez's death penalty**

By April Baumgarten  
The Forum

FARGO — Federal prosecutors will appeal a ruling that overturned Alfonso Rodriguez's death sentence.



Rodriguez

The U.S. Attorney's Office in North Dakota filed a notice to appeal Thursday, March 3, in the case against the 69-year-old on death row.

Rodriguez was found guilty in 2006 of kidnapping and killing 22-year-old Dru Sjodin. A jury sentenced Rodriguez to death in 2007, but Eight Circuit Court of Appeals Judge Ralph Erickson reversed the sentence. The judge, who also oversaw Rodriguez's trial as a U.S. District judge, ruled the defendant's trial attorneys were ineffective during the sentencing portion.

Prosecutors argued Rodriguez took Sjodin, a University of North Dakota student, from Columbia Mall in Grand Forks in November 2004, sexually assaulted her,

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## A unified response to the mental health crisis

**Hospitals, human services team up to streamline mental health problems**

By Patrick Springer  
The Forum

FARGO — Mental health crises have a way of flaring up at odd times, often during the wee hours when it's difficult to find mental health professionals to respond.

The problems are especially acute in rural areas. To fill the gaps, a new initiative uses the 211 mental health hotline to put law enforcement officers and others in touch with mental health professionals around the clock to address mental health crises.

The initiative by the North Dakota Department of Human Services, working with hospitals around the state, is

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## Sorlie Bridge lit in solidarity with Ukraine

**Herald staff**  
GRAND FORKS — As the Russian invasion of Ukraine continues, the Grand Cities are showing their support for Ukraine by lighting the Sorlie Memorial Bridge the colors of the country's flag.

The lights were turned blue and yellow on Friday night. "This is our way to show support for our friends in the Ukraine," Grand Forks Mayor Brandon Bochenski said in a news release. "... Our thoughts are with the people of Ukraine

as we pray for peace." Earlier in the week, the lights at the Alerus Center were also changed to blue and yellow. "When this request to change the lights on the Sorlie Bridge came across my desk it was an easy yes," East Grand

Forks Mayor Steve Gander said. "I am proud to display the City of East Grand Forks' support for the people of the Ukraine." The lights on Sorlie Bridge will remain blue and yellow for at least a week.



Eric Hylden/Grand Forks Herald

The Sorlie Bridge between Grand Forks and East Grand Forks is lit in blue and yellow in support of Ukraine Friday, March 4, 2022.

# TEACHING HISTORY AS IT HAPPENS

By Joe Bowen  
Grand Forks Herald

**Grand Forks**  
Kyle Ellingson projected a large map of Ukraine onto the wall of his economics classroom at Grand Forks Central High School. Red splotches pushing past the edges of the country's borders indicated the progress of invading Russian soldiers.

He pointed to Kherson, a port city in southern Ukraine that was recently captured by the Russian army.

"This is a big win for the Russians, right here," Ellingson said. "Does anybody know why the Crimean Peninsula and maybe Kherson and this area right here would be so important?"

Access to water and trade — and oil, answered 12th-grader Zach Young.

"Tons of oil in this region," Ellingson said as he waved a hand across Crimea and the Black Sea. "It's kind of like the Gulf of Mexico for the United States.... So when the Russians took that, they took that with the idea of being able to get oil, and Ukrainians want it back. Does anybody know what the Ukrainians are doing to try to get it back? Or what they have been doing over the last — since 2014?"

Russia annexed and invaded Crimea in 2014. Ukraine has been restricting water flow into the region since then, Young answered.

"There was a war before the war," Ellingson said.

**A changing world**

Ellingson is one of three social studies educators the



Eric Hylden/Grand Forks Herald

Grand Forks Central High School social studies teacher Kyle Ellingson discusses events in Ukraine with his students Thursday, March 3, 2022.

Herald interviewed to get a sense of how schools in the Grand Forks region are addressing the invasion. A reporter and photographer sat in on Ellingson's class on the morning of Thursday, March 3, at Central, where he and his students dedicated about 20 minutes to the invasion before settling into an economics lesson.

Among other things, they touched on reasons Russian President Vladimir Putin might fear Ukraine joining NATO, analyzed a political cartoon that shows Uncle Sam wondering why China won't help him put out a fire labeled "Ukraine" while he pours gasoline on it, and looked at a graph that shows the United States' declining share of global gross domestic product since the mid-1900s.

"You can use this little bit of knowledge to see how the world's a changing place," Ellingson said. "Ultimately,

where does the United States fit into it and how are we impacted when other countries do things? When other countries did things in 1960, we could just say, 'we're the United States,' right? But now, we can't just say, 'we're the United States.' We have to work with people a little bit differently because the dynamic is a little bit different."

Lilian Fairwaiz, a senior at Central, spoke up to decry war reporters who've said or implied that the invasion hits closer to home because Ukraine is more "civilized" or white than Middle Eastern countries that the U.S. has invaded.

"They're awful," she said.

Teachers at the school encourage their students to look up multiple sources of information and to think about where their information is coming from, Ellingson told the Herald.

"Sourcing is really

important," he said, "and understanding if the source that you're looking at has a slant to it is really important."

He and other school staff have taught their students about Russia and Ukraine's intertwined history. In a nutshell: Ellingson said he explains that Swedes and Russians formed a culture centered in Kyiv that was pushed to Moscow by a Mongol invasion in the 1200s.

"The kids understand that, in a sense, one of the original major cities of Russia was Kyiv, and now it's in Ukraine, kids can see the connection of how the Ukrainians and the Russians are close in terms of lineage and ethnicity and that type of thing," Ellingson, who has taught global education and world history courses, said. "Totally separate people, as you can see in the fighting, but, at the same time, there is a connection that has been historically there, either because of the early connection or forced connection by Stalin and Russian leaders."

**Draft worries**

At East Grand Forks Senior High, longtime social studies teacher Jay Frydenlund has also been fielding his students' questions about the invasion. He said they wonder what the United States can do that sits beyond the sanctions it's already imposing but stops short of sending soldiers. They also wonder why Putin hasn't been assassinated.

"It's just a lot of discussion

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BRIEFS

**Edgewood Healthcare promotes Jenni Hoffman to Executive Vice President of Resident and Employee Engagement**

GRAND FORKS — Edgewood Healthcare announced Jenni Hoffmann has been promoted to executive vice president of resident and employee engagement.



Hoffman

Hoffman began her career at Edgewood in December 2010, at its home office developing a newly-created marketing department by herself. She is from Crookston, Minnesota, and earned her bachelor's degree in public relations and real estate from St. Cloud University, as well as a master's degree at Augsburg College in Minneapolis.

"I am pleased to announce this well-deserved promotion for Jenni," Edgewood President Rob Ford said. "Jenni has built a strong marketing and

development team that provides many in-house services that not only have helped our company and communities thrive, but have brought helpful resources and education to communities within our footprint, making a true difference in the lives of our residents, families and neighbors. Jenni is a driven leader in census growth and team building. She has also been an integral part of Edgewood's numerous acquisitions, new developments, and expansions over the past 11 years."

**Red Lake Gaming Enterprises completes renovation of hotel**

RED LAKE, MINNESOTA — Red Lake Gaming Enterprises has announced the completion of a \$1.7 million renovation to its Red Lake Casino location's hotel.

The hotel is set to open to the public Sunday, March 6.

Performed by Julkowski Inc. based in Roseville, Minnesota, the renovation includes an overhaul of all 40 guest rooms in the hotel, including new

carpeting, lighting, fixtures, furniture, window coverings and wallpaper.

"We are excited to unveil our extensive hotel renovation, which is a welcomed update for our casino guests," Angela Dauphinais, CEO of Red Lake Gaming Enterprises, said. "Our newly renovated hotel perfectly complements Seven Clans Casino, Red Lake's already stunning gaming casino floor. We have listened to our guests and we are proud to be a completely smoke-free casino along with our newly renovated hotel. We will expand our reach in the area by inviting new and returning casino guests to experience a refreshed, comfortable hotel stay while enjoying our exciting casino."

Seven Clans Casino, Red Lake General Manager Roxanne Brun said the team is excited to welcome back guests to newly renovated rooms.

Seven Clans Casino, Red Lake & Hotel is close to Bemidji Minnesota. The current hours of operation are:

Monday-Thursday: 10 a.m.

- 12a.m.

Friday: 10 a.m. - 3 a.m.

Saturday: 8 a.m. - 3 a.m.

Sunday: 8 a.m. - 12 a.m.

**AIA College of Fellows inducts Michelle Mongeon Allen**

GRAND FORKS — JLG Architects CEO Michelle Mongeon Allen has been inducted into the American Institute of Architects College of Fellows.

According to a release from JLG, AIA inducts fewer than 3% of all architects into the College of Fellows, which is its highest individual honor. In 2022, 88 member-architects across the United States who "made significant contributions to the architecture profession" were inducted.

Allen, from Towner, North Dakota, graduated from NDSU with a degree in architecture in 1993 before joining JLG Architects in 2000. She moved from Grand Forks to Minne-



Allen

apolis in 2002 to open the firm's first branch office. She became a partner in 2004, was promoted to COO in 2007 and then CEO in 2017. She becomes the fifth architect from JLG to be inducted into the AIA College of Fellows. She has won a host of awards for her efforts and was recently recognized as one of Finance & Commerce's Top Women in Construction.

"This is a remarkable achievement," Dave Dimond, director of design at JLG Architects, said in the JLG release. "Michelle's fundamental character is rooted in hard work, and she reframes every challenge into a unique opportunity for JLG to extend positive impact. Growing up in Towner her compassion for smaller communities is evident in every endeavor. She has a rare authenticity that connects her drive for design excellence with a practice model that elevates the quality of life for rural communities across the upper Midwest."

By Jacob Holley  
Grand Forks Herald

**HEALTH**

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helping, said John Odermann, manager of mission and ancillary services at CHI St. Alexius in Dickinson.

"I really think this is an exciting addition to the health toolbox we have in Dickinson," he said, noting the hospital lacks an inpatient ward to treat behavioral health cases. "It has helped alleviate some of the pressure, which continues to build."

A 211 call can easily bring together law enforcement officers, health care providers and mental health professionals, enabling a collaborative approach.

"Now it's just a lot more streamlined," Odermann said. As a result, he added, some cases can be de-escalated at home, eliminating the need for hospitalization or a 24-hour hold in a jail cell.

"They're able to redirect more individuals or get some support on the phone so they don't need our emergency department," he said. Odermann, who serves on the Dickinson City Commission, said police officers also have been pleased with the results.

"They say it's been really, really helpful," he said. "It's kind of a behavioral health 911."

Each of the eight regional human service centers in North Dakota is staffed with mental health crisis response teams that operate within a 45-mile radius.

That leaves a lot of uncovered areas, gaps the North Dakota Department of Human Services is trying to fill by working with the state's 36 critical access hospitals, mostly located in rural communities.

Human services officials have been working with CHI St. Alexius Health and Sanford Health to roll out the 211 effort. Critical access hospitals can call the 211 FirstLink mental health



David Samson / The Forum

One of the room spaces at a mental health crisis bed unit in Fargo.



David Samson / The Forum

Wall messages welcome patients at a mental health crisis bed unit in Fargo.



Chris Flynn / The Forum

Fargo Chief of Police Dave Zibolski.

hotline for an initial assessment and referral. CHI St. Alexius and Sanford medical centers can provide telehealth consultation support, said Rosalie Etherington, superintendent of the North Dakota State Hospital.

CHI St. Alexius in Bismarck used the crisis response system before

extending the service to critical access hospitals.

"It's been highly successful," said Missy Wetsch, director of the emergency and trauma services as well as a behavioral health clinic for St. Alexius in Bismarck. "We have had some very, very good collaboration."

Mental health crisis response teams started years ago in Fargo at Southeast Human Service Center and later were expanded to the seven other regional centers.

"A lot of times, people just need someone to talk to," said Alanna Zeller, Southeast Human Service Center's assistant regional director.

One goal of the crisis response teams is to avoid hospitalizing people, if possible. Each of the regional human service centers has residential crisis beds available to stabilize a patient as an alternative to more costly hospitalization.

The need for mental health crisis response has spiked during the pandemic. Last year, calls jumped 44% statewide, and crisis services increased 16%. At Southeast Human Service Center, calls doubled, increasing 102%, "which is phenomenal," Etherington said.

Calls appear to be coming from an expanding number of clients, Zeller said. "Anecdotally, we have seen calls from people we've never seen before," she said. "We are seeing more citizens accessing crisis help."

The increase also reflects increased demand from walk-in visits and open access

to appointments, efforts adopted two years ago to make mental health services more accessible at the human service centers, Etherington said.

Why are calls increasing so dramatically in the southeast? "Very good question," she said. The increase could partly come from increased public education efforts, Zeller said, adding, "Otherwise, it baffles me a little bit."

By working with critical access hospitals through telehealth consultations in crisis cases, the state is trying to increase access to expertise at urban health centers to rural communities, where mental health professionals are in severely short supply, Etherington said.

"The advantage of telehealth, of course, is it extends reach," she said.

Law enforcement officers and jailers have complained that a lack of mental health services means the problem is shifted to them. As a result, people with mental illness are treated like criminals and not getting the help they need.

The changes to the mental health crisis response system are an effort to prevent police from having to address behavioral health problems, Etherington said. "In lieu of calling law enforcement and forcing a law enforcement response, we're hoping they call us first," by dialing 211, she said.

"The key is there is no closed door," Zeller said. "If you feel like it's a crisis, you can call us."

Having support available from 211 is valuable, but not all cases can be resolved over the phone, said Carlotta McCleary, executive director of Mental Health America of North Dakota.

"There's a lot of North Dakota that has no place to respond," she said. "They need somebody to come in and de-escalate in person."

The state should go further, she said, to

ensure that there are people who can handle crisis calls in the field and provide a place to stabilize people, a service that is especially lacking for children, McCleary said. "We need mobile crisis (response) that is available statewide."

The Southeast Human Service Center maintains a mobile crisis response team that is staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Still, when Fargo police are responding to an unruly person, officers aren't always able to summon a mental health professional trained in de-escalating people in the throes of a mental health crisis.

"Those folks aren't available 24/7," but often the need for services arises after hours or overnight, Fargo Police Chief David Zibolski said. "We don't have a robust program in place."

To remedy that, law enforcement agencies, health care providers and human service agencies are meeting to find ways they can collaborate to ensure round-the-clock access to trained mental health professionals.

"We're trying to marshal the resources," Zibolski said. The system under discussion would enable dispatchers to vet calls in order to decide whether to refer the case to a mental health professional or law enforcement officer.

Discussions are still in early stages, but there is agreement about the need for a better response system to deal with mental health crises, Zibolski said. "There's a lot of work that needs to be done," he said.

Few places have true 24/7 coverage to handle mental health crises, Zibolski said.

"The cost of that is astronomical," he said, but agencies and providers working together can find efficiencies.

Readers can contact reporter Patrick Springer at 701-241-5522 or pspringer@forumcomm.com.

**WORLD**

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as far as what the next move is going to be," Frydenlund told the Herald. "If we had a crystal ball, that would help a lot — but no such luck."

Ukraine, he said, hasn't been as hot of a classroom topic as others, such as the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks or the U.S. invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. Students there realize, Frydenlund said, that

the United States is keeping the conflict at arm's length.

"It seems like they're a little bit insulated from this incident," he said. "I don't know if the U.S. gets involved, then it's going to get a lot more real, but, right now, it's just a wait and watch, I guess."

A military draft has come up a few times, Frydenlund said, but his students realize it's a far-fetched possibility.

It comes up, too, in Brian Urlacher's classes at UND, where

students sometimes pick the political science and foreign policy professor's brain before and after class.

They also worry about the U.S. being drawn into the fight, but Urlacher said signs point to the American involvement amounting to economic sanctions, which makes a military intervention or a draft very unlikely. But that's complicated by the possibility of online attacks that could escalate a conflict in relatively new ways.

"We have a pretty good playbook that's been laid out over the Cold War about how nuclear-armed states push back against each other in a way that doesn't escalate to an actual shooting conflict," Urlacher told the Herald. "But that entire playbook was around proxy wars and economic tools, and it didn't include cyber warfare, which is something that is just now available as a potential strategy, and we don't know how that

works....I suspect that's why we haven't seen a cyber response shutting down the internet in Russia or disrupting communication infrastructure, because we don't know what that would look like in terms of retaliation."

Mostly, though, his students want to tell him about what they're read or heard about the conflict and pass anecdotes and other information about the invasion between one another. Ukrainian resistance messages,

Urlacher said, seem to resonate.

"I'm actually almost kind of on the sidelines in those conversations a lot of times, because the ones who are really interested and are following closely, they're excited, and they're nervous, and they're kind of processing information in real time," he said. "And it's almost sort of letting them kind of talk it through, themselves."

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